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TAGS: [PREL](#) [ARF](#) [PTER](#) [VM](#)
SUBJECT: GVN RESPONSE TO UPCOMING U.S. ARF INITIATIVES

REF: State 8005

11. (SBU) On January 31, Poloff met with MFA ASEAN Department Assistant Director General Tran Duc Binh and ASEAN Department Specialist Phan Minh Giang to deliver reftel points and to handover the Counterterrorism Transnational Crime (CTTC) Workplan proposal and U.S. comments to the draft Review of ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) Paper. Pham said the GVN would like to see the role of ARF expanded, but at a pace that is comfortable for all its members. He recognized that there is sentiment among non-ASEAN ARF members for a larger role in the ARF process, but affirmed the GVN position that ASEAN should remain the driver in ARF.

12. (SBU) Binh noted that, as an ASEAN document, the Review of ARF Paper represented the GVN's views. Responding to the specific U.S. comments to the paper, Binh suggested that after 14 years of existence, it might be time for an ARF vision statement. The GVN is already looking ahead to 2010 when it will assume the chairmanship of ASEAN and ARF. Binh said the GVN must consider its vision for ASEAN in advance of its chairmanship. He also thought strengthening the ARF secretariat is an idea worth considering. He underlined its current weakness by pointing out that the ARF website is several years out-of-date. Concerning delinking the ASEAN and ARF chairmanships and de-emphasizing ASEAN's centrality in ARF, Binh commented that these issues would be "tough nuts to crack" because they are "close to the hearts" of ASEAN members. He mentioned that Singapore plans to distribute another revised draft Review of ARF Paper to all ARF members in early February.

13. (SBU) Concerning the CTTC Workplan, Binh said the MFA would review the proposal and prepare its response in advance of the February 21-22 ISM on CTTC in Indonesia.

MICHALAK